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ABSTRACT

Although the concept of hidden curriculum has been a popular one in writings about K-12 public education, it has not been much applied to higher education doctoral programs. D. Peters and M. Peterson (1987) have discussed the possibility of a hidden curriculum in higher education, focusing on hidden curriculum as unofficial expectations, unintended learning outcomes, implicit messages, or as a curriculum created by the students. Intriguing as the idea of curriculum created by students is, this paper focuses on two aspects of hidden curriculum: unintended learning outcomes or messages of the formal curriculum and implicit messages arising from the structure of schooling. The curriculum in most higher education programs probably reflects a preponderance of works by white male scholars. This results in the unintended message that knowledge created by and about women and people of color is not important. Certain structural elements of a program results in a hidden curriculum that faculty unconsciously teach and students unconsciously learn. These include the social structure of the classroom, the teacher's exercise of authority, the rules governing the relationship between teacher and student, standard learning activities, and structural barriers in the institution. Faculty members or administrators who uncover the hidden curriculum in their current programs can determine if what the hidden curriculum teaches is what they want students to know. (SLD)

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Is There a Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education Doctoral Programs?

Barbara K. Townsend

> Most of us never stop to think that the settings we enter have hidden curricula, let alone what those hidden curricula might be. (Martin, 1976, p. 149)

Although the concept of hidden curriculum has been a popular one in writings about K-12 public schooling,, it has not been much applied to higher education doctoral programs. Only Peters and Peterson (1987) have indicated the possibility of a hidden curriculum in higher education doctoral programs. In their national study of these programs, they found "two so-called curriculums" (p. 29). One was the formal course work or "cognitive curriculum" (p. 29). The other was

> a social context wherein a student has opportunities for practicing the cognitive dimensions in a controlled setting. Figuratively speaking, the social context or hidden curriculum is an arena for practise (sic) before practice, for trying out cooperative ventures before the stakes are too high, for engaging the behavioral dimensions of the academic career. To summarize, if higher education can be described as understanding in action, then the cognitive curriculum represents understanding and the hidden curriculum, in action (pp. 29-30).

Peters and Peterson's definition of hidden curriculum as the social context for practicing professional

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behaviors is unusual and does not fit with the four standard meanings of the concept. According to Portelli (1993, p. 345), scholars define the hidden curriculum in the following four ways:

a) the hidden curriculum as the unofficial expectations, or implicit but expected messages;

b) the hidden curriculum as unintended learning outcomes or messages;

c) the hidden curriculum as implicit messages arising from the structure of schooling;

d) the hidden curriculum as created by the students.

Hidden Curriculum as Created by Students

Among studies of the hidden curriculum in the sector of higher education, Benson Snyder's (1971) description of the hidden curriculum at M.I.T. is perhaps the best known. Snyder's work reflects the perspective that the hidden curriculum is something "created by the students." In this perspective full-time students, facing assignments from several courses, and part-time students, encountering a multiplicity of demands upon their time, tease out from among instructors' course requirements what absolutely must be done in order to pass. Students ask themselves, "What are the actual hurdles one must jump? How important is style or form in making the jump? Is it enough simply to get over the hurdle?" (Lin, 1979, p. 289). For example, the formal curriculum in a course may call for all students to read five books, upon which they will be tested at the course's end. However, students learn and pass on to one another that in-depth knowledge of only three of the books is actually required to pass. Demonstration of a superficial acquaintance with the other two will suffice. Thus the hidden curriculum is uncovered by the students but remains hidden from the faculty.

When this meaning of hidden curriculum is applied to higher education doctoral programs,

the hidden curriculum is what students perceive they must do 1) to pass individual courses of particular instructors; 2) to pass doctoral comprehensive examinations; and 3) to write a dissertation proposal and dissertation acceptable to particular professors.

Perhaps an example will illustrate this perspective. At one institution where I taught, there was a colleague in the higher education program whose grades on a paper seemed to be determined by its length and number of references. He rarely made comments about any part of the papers, except for an overall assessment such as "Good paper" and never commented on the organization or coherency of the paper. Students passed on to one another their understanding of the hidden curriculum in his classes: To get an A on any paper, just write grammatically correct, lengthy papers and use lots of references.

I find the concept of the hidden curriculum as something created by the students to be very intriguing. However, it is not the perspective I wish to adopt to frame the rest of my presentation today. Rather, I will draw from two other meanings of hidden curriculum: first, the idea of hidden curriculum as "unintended learning outcomes or messages" of the formal curriculum, and second, the hidden curriculum as "implicit messages arising from the structure of schooling" (Portelli, 1993; p.345).

Hidden Curriculum as Unintended Learning Outcomes or Messages

Anyone who is aware of feminist scholarship, Afrocentrism, postmodernism, etc., is aware of the arguments that knowledge is socially constructed, and that this construction plays out in the classroom, partially in the choice of the formal curriculum. The formal curriculum of all programs, including higher education doctoral programs, is politically and culturally shaped and laden. Depending on the content of the formal curriculum, it can serve to reinforce the dominant culture

or expose and awaken students to non-traditional political, economic, and cultural perspectives and orientations. When a curriculum is consciously designed to reinforce the dominant culture, then this reinforcement is an intended outcome. However, if faculty construct a curriculum without thinking what world view it teaches or reinforces, then the world view the students derive from the curriculum becomes an unintended outcome or message.

Let's look at a possible example of this in a higher education program. A course on organization and governance in higher education is standard fare in most higher education doctoral programs. Students taking this course usually learn about Cohen and March's work on organized anarchy, Baldridge's on the political model of governance, and Millet's on the collegial model. They may also read Birnbaum's work on the college presidency, and Bolman and Deal's on the four frames of leadership. What they usually don't learn, because they are not assigned or even listed as suggested readings, are feminist perspectives on organizational behavior, work on gender variations in leadership styles, and studies of women as leaders. They may also not be introduced to the construct that perceptions of effective leadership vary across cultures. They also don't usually read about leadership in community colleges and how these institutions may have different governance needs than four-year schools. In fact, the course they are taking could more accurately be labeled, "Organization and Governance in the Four-Year Sector Using Models Developed by White Males." Labeling it in this way would be truth in advertising and would also publicly acknowledge the political, cultural, and institutional limits of the course's curriculum. An unintended outcome or hidden curriculum of such a course is that students are reinforced in the perception that community colleges are peripheral in higher education, even though they are almost a third of higher education institutions and enroll close to a third of the students in postsecondary education. Students are also

reinforced in the paradigms of white, male leadership, paradigms they already know well through personal experience as well as formal study.

I could give other examples of how the curriculum in most higher education programs probably reflects a preponderance of works by white, male scholars even at a time when scholarship by women and people of color has contributed new insights and broadened significantly the knowledge bases in our field. An unintended outcome of this domination of the curriculum by works of white, male authors is the inference that knowledge created by and about women and people of color is not as important. In a sense this work becomes what Eisner has called the "null curriculum," that which is not taught (as cited in King, 1986).

Let me turn now to my second definition of the hidden curriculum in higher education doctoral programs: the hidden curriculum implicit in the structure of the programs.

Hidden Curriculum Implicit in Program's Structural Components

Certain structural elements of a program result in a hidden curriculum that faculty unconsciously teach and students unconsciously learn as they progress through a program. Citing Vallance, Martin (1976) lists several "sources of important elements of hidden curricula of schools" such as "the social structure of the classroom, the teacher's exercise of authority, the roles governing the relationship between teacher and student . . . [and] standard learning activities" (p. 140). I shall discuss these elements as they pertain to higher education programs and also look at structural barriers within the institution.

The social structure of the classroom. Social relations between faculty and students and among students provide insight into a program's hidden curriculum. Between faculty and students, messages are sent by the faculty member's treatment of students in the classroom. These messages

may also affect relationships among students. If the professor interrupts students, the implicit message is that students' words and thoughts are less important than the professor's are. Also, because they are interrupted by the professor, students may also assume that it is all right to interrupt one another. Instructors who model more courteous behavior not only send the message that it is inappropriate to interrupt others, but also that the professors value what each student has to say and so should the students.

This message is also conveyed when professors ask that students monitor their degree of participation in a class. For some students that means restraining themselves so as to let others participate; for other students that means forcing themselves to engage in class discussion. Instructors can also monitor their own behavior so that they do not always dominate class discussions. When the instructor's voice is always the primary one, students internalize the message that their voices merely serve as background music rather than as a chorale with its own songs to sing.

Social relations are also evidenced by the extent to which students help one another in class. Given that in higher education doctoral programs, grades are largely confined to A's and B's (Peters and Peterson 1987), graduate students do not need to be concerned with competing against one another for grades. When faculty do not provide ways for students to develop a sense of student solidarity and cooperation in a class, the implicit message is that working together and viewing each other as colleagues or teammates in the learning process is not valued and valuable.

The teacher's exercise of authority. Fostering cooperation among students also has an outcome of developing a sense of student independence from the faculty. This may not be an outcome desired by faculty using the banking model of instruction. In this model students are highly

dependent upon the teacher. The faculty member's explication of the text(s) is the only or dominant interpretation. Students' perspectives may not even be asked or may be devalued when given, particularly if the perspective seems to be derived from the student's lived experience rather than experts in the field. The implicit message is that students must rely on faculty to learn and that students cannot learn from their own experiences and from one another.

The rules governing the relationship between teacher and student. One way of ascertaining the relationship between teacher and students is to listen to the forms of address. Do students call the faculty by their first name or by "Dr. . . . "? If students use "Doctor," while faculty call students by their first name, the implicit message is that professors perceive a status differential between themselves and students and want this differential acknowledged publicly. This desire to have their educational status acknowledged is problematic in light of the non-traditionality of students in higher education programs. Quite a few of these students are older than some of their professors, hold senior-level positions at their institutions, and earn considerably more than the professors. The only visible area in which the professors have more than these students is in the amount of educational credentials. The need for these professors to remind their students (and perhaps themselves) of this difference sends a message that educational credentials are a measure of one's worth and status.

The extent to which faculty are available to students also is a measure of the relationship between them. In most higher education programs, students work full-time and attend graduate school part-time. In spite of this, some professors schedule office hours only during the morning because this schedule suits their needs. The outcome, and let us hope it is unintended, is that these professors are rarely visited by students. The implicit message these professors are sending is that students' convenience is not as important to them as their own convenience.

The scheduling of courses may also reflect professors' attitudes toward the needs of students. Different messages are sent according to when the courses are scheduled. In my department, most faculty do not want to teach during both five-week summer sessions. Rather they wish to teach in the first five-week session. At the same time most of the department's students are K-12 teachers or higher education faculty and administrators who have more time in the summer to take courses than during the school year. These students yearn for courses in both summer sessions but are unable to take courses second summer session because faculty won't teach during this session. The overt message to students is that faculty value them and will do what they can to help them complete their program of study as quickly as possible. However, the actual message sent by summer course scheduling is that faculty members' convenience is more important than students' needs.

Standard learning activities. There are also implicit messages in the structure of a program's standard learning activities. Two standard learning activities in doctoral programs are comprehensive examinations and the dissertation. Many programs structure their doctoral comprehensive examinations so that students in the same field of study take their examination at the same time and answer the same questions. There is an element of social Darwinism in requiring standardized examinations to be taken by all students at the same limited time period. All students are required to jump through the identical hoop at the same time. Those who complete the jump are thus judged the fittest or best students; those who get stuck in the hoop aren't good enough for the program and should be dropped. The hidden or implicit message is that standardization is important, and individualization is not.

This message can be countered somewhat if students are urged by their professors to form study groups, rather than go it alone in solitary study. Efforts to bring the students together to

discuss forming a study group and provide group members with material such as previous exams and course syllabi send the message that collaboration and team work are valued and can contribute to students' success.

When students move to the dissertation stage, the general ethos in the program is most clearly shown. The program may be structured so that students are left on their own to find a dissertation topic and develop a research question, or there may be programmatic support through courses, seminars, and workshops. Lack of structured curricular and other formal support again suggests a "survival of the fittest" perspective on the part of the program and its faculty. The implicit message is that it is almost entirely the student's responsibility to complete the dissertation. In contrast, provision of explicit structural support conveys that faculty and students are in this together and work as a team to complete the dissertation.

Structural barriers within the institution: Sometimes institutional factors work against faculty members' efforts to develop cooperation and support among students. At my current institution, the University has spent millions to erect a beautiful new library. Unfortunately, many of its shelves are empty because little money is budgeted for books and journals. By constructing what is essentially a hollow edifice to learning, institutional leaders send the message that appearance is more important than reality. The students respond by competing with one another for the few materials that are in the library. At the beginning of each semester, students attuned to the lack of resources rush to the library and check out every book that seems remotely related to a topic that might be studied in their courses. The library policy that graduate students may keep books for the whole semester helps ensure that other students do not gain access to these materials. Some students even cut the pages out of journals, with the result that other students can't use the articles

for their research.

Other factors in the library send a message that students' time and pocketbook are not important. Journal articles can be ordered from other institutions, but students must pay for the articles and may have to wait weeks for them. Consequently, students on a limited income or a tight schedule for paper completion may choose their research topics, not on the basis of what interests them but rather on what materials are available.

Implications for Practice

The above are but some examples of how higher education doctoral programs have a hidden curriculum implicit in their structure as well as their formal curriculum. I hope this paper will stimulate you to examine your own higher education program for its hidden curriculum. As you do so, you may want to ask the following questions:

1) What are the formal relationships that exist between participants in the program and how are they expressed?

2) What are the informal relationships and how are they expressed?

3) Is accommodation to the faculty or to the students' needs evident in the structure of the program?

4) Are there formal structures that facilitate cooperation and support or competition and competitiveness?

Faculty members or administrators who uncover or decode the hidden curriculum in their current programs can determine if what the hidden curriculum teaches is what they want students to learn. Students can assess if the program's hidden curriculum is consonant with their own values. If not, students may work to change the program's hidden curriculum or may elect to leave the

program. In either case, there can be benefit to the student and to the program.

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